

Minutes
Regular meeting of the City of Reading Planning Commission
February 2, 2016 at 7:08 pm

Members present:

Ermete J. Raffaelli, Chairman
Wayne Jonas Bealer, Vice Chairman
Michael E. Lauter, Secretary
William F. Cinfici, Assistant Secretary

Staff present:

Andrew W. Miller, Planning Office
Deborah A.S. Hoag, Department of Public Works

Others present:

Andrew J. Barton, Larson Design Group
Dee Anderson, Hutchinson Realty Development LLC
Stephen H. Bensinger, Stackhouse Bensinger Inc.
Russell DiGiallorenzo Jr., Russell Plywood Inc.
David A. Kostival, Reading Eagle Company

Chairman Raffaelli called the January meeting to order, postponed a week from January 26th to February 2nd on account of a recent snow storm, and asked for acceptance of the agenda. Mr. Miller asked that they include a vote reaffirming the approval of the Emmanuel's House parking plan. Mr. Lauter moved to accept the January 26th agenda, as modified. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the January agenda.

Subdivision and Land Development:

S. 6th Street Family Dollar – final land development plan [0:00.16]

Mr. Barton referred to the latest Planning Office review, and the information since added to the plan. He said the landscaping plan had been approved by the City Arborist. He said the matter of an annual agreement with the Reading Parking Authority – a condition imposed by the Zoning Hearing Board, with regard to the lot at 401 South 6th Street – wasn't discussed in advance with the Authority who have since indicated they have no interest in operating it. Ms. Anderson said they still don't plan to restrict the neighborhood's use of the lot. She said signage will indicate Family Dollar's ownership and they will attempt to regulate any inappropriate use or activity thereon, making the store managers aware of its relation to the store and the required maintenance. Mr. Raffaelli asked if enough parking was available at 400 South 6th Street, should they ever part with the lot at 401. Mr. Barton said yes, and referred to the zoning variance. He said they've received the updated Berks County Conservation District approval, and an 'okay' from the Fire Marshal for the relocation of the existing fire hydrant. He said review comments regarding on-street parking restrictions – another condition of the Zoning Hearing Board, related to loading activity – were no longer relevant because delivery trucks will be positioned outside of the cartway, and the adjacent parking spaces will remain available. He thought the condition related to an earlier design of the loading area. Concerning the remaining issues of the Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB), Mr. Miller said a number of inconsistencies remain in terms of the HARB's October 2015 decision. Having since reconsidered the architectural design at meetings of the HARB's executive committee, November 10th, December 8th and January 12th, the full HARB intends a second, clarifying action at their February 16th meeting. Asked if a municipal improvements agreement would be required, Ms. Hoag said yes, acknowledging a draft estimate, but waiting on the final design before finalizing the numbers. Mr. Barton indicated accessible ramps added at the corners of Pine Street. Whereas the properties had recently transferred to the developer's ownership, and ahead of a record plan, Mr. Miller sought additional notes explaining the removal of the signature block provided for the Reading Redevelopment Authority, rather than altering all the ownership information already given and verified on the plan. Mr. Barton agreed and said he didn't have any other issues with the Planning Office review. Mr. Miller indicated his satisfaction, subject to the usual conditions of the latest staff reviews and the terms of the forthcoming HARB action. Mr. Raffaelli referred to the excavation already underway, and his discomfort with what the Zoning Administrator had apparently authorized. Asked if they had a permit and from whom, Mr. Barton referred to their preliminary approval. Ms. Anderson wasn't sure either, and claimed they were only filling an existing basement, deemed a hazard. Mr. Raffaelli reminded them of the recording requirements, should the plan be granted a final approval.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the 'S. 6th Street Family Dollar' final plan, subject to revisions satisfying the most-recent reviews of the Planning Office and Public Works Department, and reflecting the pending action of the

Historical Architectural Review Board. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to conditionally approve the Family Dollar final plan.

Resolution #1-2016

LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar – final land development plan [0:19.26]

Mr. Barton described the Lancaster Avenue plan as being ‘a little further behind’ the South 6th Street design’s progress, in part because of the driveway design and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) jurisdiction, adding that the District 5 design preferences were different than others. He said he’d be resubmitting to PennDOT, and turned toward the Planning Office and Public Works Department reviews, intending to submit a revised plan once the driveway permitting issues were resolved. Ms. Hoag asked about the turning radius of trucks from Lancaster Avenue to Carroll Street, given its angle, and wondered if an alternate approach was preferable. She noted the on-street parking further restricting that movement. Mr. Barton said they’d check it. Mr. Miller alluded to some missing features, and the possible need for additional ‘field work’. Asked about soil testing and underground tanks, Ms. Anderson said that had already been addressed and the tanks removed. Mr. Miller referred to a plan note indicating they’d remain. Mr. Barton clarified that the tanks remain, and have been filled with concrete. Asked if they were closed in accord with the regulations and documented, Ms. Anderson said yes. Mr. Miller asked that it be further explained and documented in the plan notes. Mr. Raffaelli asked for the architectural elevations. Mr. Barton said they weren’t presently available, but confirmed an exterior clad in concrete block and metal siding, unable to be any more specific. Mr. Raffaelli advised that they prepare them for the next presentation, and asked about the lighting design. Ms. Anderson said they were unable to make any changes to the design, unless submitted to and approved by the Family Dollar corporation. Mr. Barton offered to ‘look at it’. Mr. Miller opined that the landscaping included would make an aesthetic impact, and agreed that some façade lighting would complement it. He noted the elevation difference, between the site and the nearby residential area, advising that all light fixtures be placed with it in mind. He asked if an extension of the review period was being offered, as his review letter had indicated. Mr. Barton said he hadn’t prepared anything, wondering what was required. Mr. Miller explained that the statutory deadline would expire prior to the Commission’s next meeting, and preferred that any offer be made in monthly increments. Mr. Barton then handwrote an offer of three additional months, for Ms. Anderson signature. Ms. Hoag felt the PennDOT design issues to be the biggest issue, from the ‘engineering’ perspective, and suggested pursuing additional on-site stormwater infiltration opportunities. Mr. Barton considered shifting or narrowing the Carroll Street driveway, subject to some underground utility conflicts, such that flows could be directed toward a landscaped area. Asked if the ‘231’ address is acceptable for the new store, Ms. Anderson said it is.

Mr. Bealer moved to table the ‘LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar’ final plan. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to table the Family Dollar final plan.

Mr. Lauter moved to extend the review of the ‘LGN: Lancaster Ave. Family Dollar’ plan by three months, as requested in the handwritten letter signed by the owner. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to approve a three-month extension for the Lancaster Avenue Family Dollar final plan.

Resolution #2-2016

Russell Plywood Building Addition – final land development plan [0:47.54]

Mr. Bensinger picked up with the truck traffic and parking issues raised at the December 22nd meeting, referring to the written narrative offered in response. He said it explains the current volume and projected reduction. He mentioned a few plan details he’d yet to address, and asked for a final approval. Asked about the history of their occupancy, Mr. DiGiallorenzo estimated ‘since the mid 60s’, recalling the flooding from Hurricane Agnes (1972). Mr. Raffaelli mentioned his own research, indicating that Russell Plywood owns half of the vacated Old Wyomissing Road. Mr. Miller disagreed, explaining that, even when vacated, a new legal description is required to formally claim vacated rights-of-way. Mr. Bensinger added that, at the time of an earlier addition, the Road didn’t show on the City’s topographic map, and still doesn’t, officially ending at a point in its 700 block. He recalled that, with the approval of the addition, the Planning Commission determined to recognize a 40-foot-wide right-of-way extending to the Russell Plywood frontage. He mentioned a through route predating the West Shore Bypass construction (1958-1965). Ms. Hoag alluded to the vacating of another nearby street, where one adjoiner acted to claim their share of the width while the other did not. Mr. Raffaelli suggested it would benefit the owners to claim the vacated width. Mr. Miller hesitated, referring to the zoning requirement for lot frontage on a public street, and a change that would create a nonconformity. He said he would research the files for information on the extended right-of-way. Mr. Raffaelli related a story about the history of a former street between the Reading Body and Baldwin Brass properties. He suggested the benefits of opening the private road between Old Wyomissing Road and Brookline Street. Mr. Bensinger stated that the road is fully on a neighboring property, demonstrated by an

earlier (Gibbons) survey. Mr. Raffaelli noted the Pacific Pride commercial fueling station at 101 Brookline Street, a shortened trip to the highways and an easier grade in inclement weather.

Asked about the stormwater discharge, Mr. Bensinger said they were all but certain of its location as shown, having again attempted a definitive location, and hindered by the riprap and concrete concealing it. He noted the 'washout' as another clue, but determined it to be inaccessible without a heavy excavation. He said the location is shown on an earlier land development plan, and everything suggests it exists in that position. Ms. Hoag suggested a dye test or another means of tracing it. Mr. Bensinger agreed that the following day might present that opportunity with the forecasted rains.

Mr. Lauter appreciated the traffic narrative and asked for some clarifications on its counts and the company's shipping practices. Mr. DiGiallorenzo said they require the inbound deliveries by noon, subject to occasional exceptions, and explained that the drivers are employed by his suppliers, complicating the enforcement of any in-house policies. He mentioned a potential future warehouse facility on a neighboring property and a possible staging area for trucks. He said such a development wouldn't increase traffic and might solve some of the neighborhood parking nuisances. Mr. Lauter thought the intended City signage would sooner alleviate the issue. Mr. Raffaelli asked about the weights and contents of the trucks. Mr. DiGiallorenzo estimated a 52,000-pound maximum, with 18,000-21,000 on average. Asked for further explanation of the Old Wyomissing Road topography, Mr. Bensinger explained that, except for the two semi-detached dwellings just west of the Beltline railroad overpass (612 and 612R Old Wyomissing Road), each of the residential properties have the proper frontage. Mr. Miller recalled the wording of the vacating ordinance [*actually, the opening ordinance, Bill No. 7-1932*], in relation to 3rd Avenue, and advised that some formal action by the City may be necessary to settle the matter finally. Mr. Cinfici emphasized a statement in the traffic narrative intending 'every effort to reinforce the delivery limitations and times'. Ms. Hoag suggested some clarifications and changes to the noted stormwater operation and maintenance practices. Mr. Bensinger agreed to reconsider that and add additional notes and details. Mr. Miller repeated his recommendation to communicate with the neighbor regarding the work near the property line and any possible encroachment. Mr. Bensinger said that party is unreachable until February 8th. Mr. DiGiallorenzo added that his representatives are aware of the project and that he'd continue 'reaching out'. Mr. Bensinger said the excavation contractor felt confident in keeping the work within the property and referred to it as a civil issue between the landowners. Mr. Miller agreed, still wanting to be on record having advised the developer of the concern.

Mr. Bealer moved to approve the final plan, subject to further study and documentation of the stormwater management concerns and satisfaction of the latest Planning Office and Public Works Department reviews. Mr. Lauter seconded. And the Commission voted 3 to 1, to approve the 'Russell Plywood Building Addition' final plan, Mr. Raffaelli casting the dissent.

Resolution #3-2016

Other business:

review the draft December 22, 2015 meeting minutes [1:37.15]

Mr. Cinfici moved to accept the December 22nd minutes, as presented. Mr. Bealer seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to accept the December meeting minutes.

Resolution #4-2016

§513.a approval reaffirmation-Parking Lot Expansion Emmanuel's House Property [1:38.28]

Mr. Miller summarized the background of the original approval, and the pending improvements agreement issue. He mentioned that the work had already started.

Mr. Lauter moved to reaffirm the October 2015 parking plan approval. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission voted unanimously to reaffirm their October 27th approval, Resolution No. 51-2015, for the 'Parking Lot Expansion Emmanuel's House Property' parking lot plan.

Resolution #5-2016

Mr. Miller shared a sketch of additional parking spaces at 612 McKnight Street, what was known as the 'Gehris Self Storage' plan when it was approved in 2012. He said the latest design was granted a setback variance for the additional spaces. Following a discussion, the Commission agreed to consider a 'revision to record' plan.

Mr. Lauter moved to adjourn the belated January meeting. Mr. Cinfici seconded. And the Commission adjourned their February 2nd meeting. – 8:55p